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Editorial: State GOP ignores the economy

Adopted June 7, 2014, the Indiana Republican Party could have begun the platform with any topic. It chose the heading: “Jobs and Economic Growth.”

“We are committed to creating an environment where jobs and our economy can grow,” it read. “The proper role of government in this equation is to get out of the way The Pence Administration’s overarching goal is more jobs in Indiana than ever before.”

After what happened in secret Thursday, the state’s GOP should renounce this platform as a matter of consistency. Republican Gov. Mike Pence convened a private ceremony wherein he signed Senate Bill 101, the state’s “Religious Freedom Restoration Act.” No one in his circle should be shocked by the backlash. It’s not as if they weren’t warned.

“Last year, Gen Con hosted more than 56,000 attendees ... culminating in an estimated annual economic impact of more than \$50 million,” read a letter written Monday by Adrian Swartout, Gen Con CEO and owner, to Pence after the bill was sent to his desk. “Legislation that could allow for refusal of service or discrimination against our attendees ... will factor into our decision-making on hosting the convention in the state.”

This was just the beginning.

“Today we are canceling all programs that require our customers/employees to travel to Indiana to face discrimination,” wrote Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff on Twitter Thursday.

The hits kept coming.

“San Francisco city employees are no longer allowed to travel on the taxpayer’s dollar to Indiana,” reported Laura Dudnick of The San Francisco Examiner.

Seeing his city’s potential revenue slipping away, even Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard broke with GOP ranks and came out against the bill. Still, the dominoes continued to fall. Even organizations that call Indiana home were beginning to feel nervous.

“The NCAA national office and our members are deeply committed to providing an inclusive environment for all our events,” wrote Mark Emmert, NCAA president, Thursday. “Moving forward, we intend to closely examine the implications of this bill and how it might affect future events as well as our workforce.”

This was the reaction less than 24 hours after the bill was signed. Expect more. And it’s especially worrisome, since tourism is no small part of our state’s economy.

“Total Indiana tourism expenditures surpassed \$10 billion for the first time since the start of the Great Recession, up 5.2 percent from 2011,” read the state’s 2012 Economic Impact of Tourism report.

Pence and his cohorts can say whatever they want about this bill. What they can’t do is say they care about our state’s economy above all else; not any more.